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THE TRANS-MIGRATION OF SOULS

BY

D. ALFRED BERTHOLET

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THE TRANSMIGRATION OF SOULS

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THE TRANSMIGRATION OF SOULS

CHAPTER I

THE BELIEF THAT THE SOUL CAN BE SEPARATED FROM MAN'S BODY

LET us first consider the belief that man has a soul which can be separated from his body, or, to express the idea by a metaphor, that the connection of the soul with the body is that of a guest with a house in which he stays and lives, with the intention of leaving it after a certain lapse of time. So far as we can tell, this idea can be traced to the earliest periods of man's mental history. In modern times the popular conclusion that a "soul" exists, is usually deduced from the phenomena of "thought, perception, and will": man

has a soul, because he can think, feel, and will. In the uninterrupted activity of these normal intellectual functions, we believe that we may observe, so to speak, the pulsation which indicates their vitality. Primitive man reasoned very differently: his attention, like that of a child, was first attracted, not by the normal and its constant regular recurrence, but by the abnormal, which struck him as strange and extraordinary. Now man was confronted by one abnormal fact, which even now he has not entirely ceased to regard as unusual, the fact of death. Death, then, must first be considered when we ask what led men to infer the existence of the soul.

What is the chief fact that distinguishes the living man from the dead? The only outward sign is the cessation of respiration. With the last breath a "something" leaves the body, which existed within it during life. A window or door is thrown open when a man dies, a custom still widespread

among our own country folk. Similarly, Hottentots, Fiji Islanders, Samoyeds, Indians, Siamese, Chinese, and others make a hole in the roof of the house or hut in which a man dies, apparently with the object of offering free passage to the mysterious "something" which leaves the body at death. I speak of the mysterious "something": but the poet of old unhesitatingly gives it a name, in describing the death of Orpheus:

"The soul, breathed forth, then faded in the air."

This breath or spirit-soul (in the most different languages the word "soul" originally means simply breath) thus withdraws from the eye of man, which has no power to perceive it. But suppose for a moment that primitive man, whose psychological knowledge is not equal to ours, sees a dream and dreams, perhaps, that his dead friend is hunting with him as in days gone by: he sees him string his bow, shoot his arrow,

pursue the animal he has hit, and call upon his friend to follow: a conversation ensues, as has happened often enough in his lifetime, and so forth. How is the dreamer to explain these experiences when he wakes? The body of his dead friend lies motionless in the grave, a prey to corruption. Yet it was the form of his friend that he saw in his dream, and it was his friend's voice that he heard: with his own eyes he saw him, with his own ears he heard him speak. What is he to understand? To conclude, as we should conclude, that it was merely a dream is so obvious a statement that we can hardly conceive of any other reply. But the power to discriminate between dream illusions and reality is by no means innate in man and must be acquired by experience: only after a long course of development was it attained. A very different conclusion offered itself to primitive man: what he saw and heard in his sleep was, in reality, his friend: but the

appearance could not have been that of the body resting in the grave—of this early man was well assured. Hence it must have been a "something" bewilderingly like the dead body, a second ego, a double, and in a word, the mysterious "something" that had left the body with the last breath. Such, in fact, is the conclusion with which we meet among primitive tribes. Instructive also is the form in which it appears, in the words placed by Homer in the mouth of Achilles, when his dead friend, Patroclus, appears to him in a dream:

"Gods! of a truth, then, I ween in the shadowy houses of Hades
Spirit and form do abide, but within them is no understanding.
For in this selfsame night the form of the hapless Patroclus
Hovered above me and wept with sore lamentation and wailing,
Spake his behests, and marvellous like to himself was the phantom."—ILIAD xxiii, 103–107.

This belief in the existence of a soul that can be separated from the body is deeply rooted in the mind of man. The theory seemed to provide an explanation of all dream experiences. The dreamer, for instance, finds himself in a distant region which he had visited long before. His body has not moved from the couch on which he lies; it is therefore his soul which has left him to renew acquaintance with that distant spot: the soul returns with the impressions gained by its experience and the dreamer awakes. Such theories have, in some instances, led primitive tribes (e.g. the Malays) to believe that it is dangerous to wake a sleeping man; his soul might have left his body and might be unable to return immediately, in which case the body would be left "soulless." The difference is one only of degree: in sleep and dreams the soul leaves the body temporarily, while in death the separation is final, an idea expressed in the Koran and

there given a wonderful religious significance: "God takes to Himself the souls of men at their death; and He takes also to Himself the souls of those who do not die, while they sleep. He keeps with Him the souls of those whose death He has ordained, but the others He sends back for a season. Truly herein lie signs for thoughtful men to ponder" (Sura xxxix).

Other psychical phenomena doubtless served to confirm this primitive theory. The word "ecstasy," for instance, "a standing outside of oneself," implies the exit of the soul from the body (cf. 2 Cor. xii, 2 f.).

These few indications may serve to prove that the belief in the possibility of a separation between soul and body was both vivid and widely spread. This belief may be regarded as the first necessary condition antecedent to the belief in metempsychosis.

CHAPTER II

THE BELIEF THAT ORGANISMS OTHER THAN HUMAN POSSESS SOULS

WE have stated that the second antecedent condition was the belief that beings or objects beyond the limits of human life possessed souls of similar nature. The further we pursue the history of the past, the more general does this belief appear. Nor is it necessary to seek instances in remote antiquity. We need only observe how our own children personify everything around them with their own characteristics. A little girl sings her doll to sleep as she has herself been sung to sleep by her own mother; and asks the doll in the morning how it has slept, just as she may be asked by her mother. A child will beat the stick that has tripped it up, for its naughtiness which caused the fall and deserved punish-

ment, even as the child's own shortcomings are punished. Mankind at large has entertained ideas no less infantile during the long course of its development, nor has it by any means everywhere emerged from the stage in which the individual regards the objects about him as endowed with souls akin to his own.

ANIMAL SOULS

Animals are first regarded as possessing souls. In modern histories of religious thought, the term "totemism" will occasionally be found. The term is used to signify the belief existing among Indian tribes and also elsewhere, that man is related to a particular species of animal, or is even descended from it. The believer then takes the name of his totem animal, as we take our family names, calls himself the bear, the beaver, the raven, etc., designs the animal upon his weapons, and is careful to avoid harming or killing any member of

the species. Should he kill a totem animal at any time, the act is performed with the most elaborate precautions. If, for instance, the Chippewa Indians kill a bear, they attempt to justify their action to the victim, put the pipe of peace in the animal's mouth, and solemnly beg the bear to forgo his vengeance. Similar ceremonies are performed by the Samoyeds in a far distant country and a wholly different climate. Such instances, which might be infinitely multiplied, prove that man regards animals as possessing souls of human character, and that their souls, like those of men, are thought to survive bodily death, and often as likely to become formidable enemies. Conversely, these souls may prove useful: the Arab of antiquity was buried with his camels; the German warrior's charger was slaughtered at his grave; a noteworthy survival of this custom is the habit of leading a dead man's favourite horse in the procession on the occasion of a solemn

funeral. In either case is the undoubted presence of a belief that the dead man could use the animals for riding in the next world. In short, as man's nature is twofold, and as the spiritual element survives on the death of the corporeal, so also is the nature of animals. Moreover, it must be remembered that to men in the earlier stages of civilisation the difference between man and animal is by no means so wide as we are accustomed to think: the reason is not far to seek; early man's occupation and profession of nomadic cattle breeder brought him into daily and hourly contact with his animals; he lived under the same roof, or even in the same room with them. "Ethos," in Greek, was once a term which implied association in one dwelling. It is sufficiently significant that our modern word, "ethics," seems to be derived from ethos as a comprehensive term for the first rules which governed the intercourse of man with the other inmates of his house.

In any case, in simpler ages man regarded his animals as no less members of society than his comrades and friends; the Indian talks to his horse, and the Arab to his camel. "Even the cattle understand what is spoken in words," is a saying in the famous Indian collection of fairy tales, the Pancatantra. Nor did a less sophisticated age than ours find anything surprising in the idea that animals could occasionally use human language, or at least a language immediately intelligible to man. Animals occasionally appear as announcing imminent danger or good fortune, for they have knowledge of much that man cannot even suspect. We usually relegate animal language to the region of fables and fairy tales: for instance, in the tale of the Sleeping Beauty, a frog jumps out of the water, speaks to the queen who is longing for a child, and promises that her wish shall be fulfilled.

Similar examples might be quoted with-

out end. But we must remember that as the vein of gold gleams in the heart of the rock, so the features characteristic of these stories are but fragments from the infinite storehouse of popular beliefs. As a matter of fact, the close connection and intercourse between men and animals has not been without effect upon the latter: the more man associates with them, the nearer do they approach him on the intellectual side; we may realise the fact by comparing the dog in European civilisation with the dog in the East, where he is avoided as an unclean animal. Thus it is natural that increased association with animals should increase belief in their kinship with man and in the similarity of their souls to his. This ancient idea finds wonderfully poetic and yet most realistic expression in Ibsen's "Sea Woman." When Wangel asks his wife on what subject she has been continually talking with "the strange man," she replies, "We spoke chiefly of the sea . . . of storm and calm,

of dark nights upon the sea. We also spoke of the sea on bright sunlight days. But for the most part we spoke of the whales and dolphins, and of the seals which usually lie out there upon the rocks in the heat of the day. And then, you know, we spoke of the gulls and eagles and other sea-birds. And I tell you, is it not strange? When we spoke of these things, it seemed to me as if all of them, sea-animals and sea-birds, were related to him." "And you also?" asks Wangel. And his wife replies, "Yes, it seemed as if I also was kin to them all!" Hebbel has expressed a similar belief with no less art in his "Nibelungen," in the words he gives to the serpent.

> "On him that is outcast and scorned of men,
> Denied by his own brethren and betrayed,
> Do thou bestow protection, and recall
> Kinship as ancient as the world itself."

Something of this "ancient kinship," together with other primitive features, has been transferred, as is well known, to the

millennium by Israelitish prophecy, in such passages as Hosea ii, 18; Isa. xi, 6 ff. and elsewhere.

PLANT SOULS

Animals thus have souls akin to those of men: so also, in the belief of primitive man, have plants, trees, shrubs, flowers, etc. For this reason, for instance, in Silesia the death of the master of the house is announced not only to the cattle in the stalls, and to the bees in the hive, but also to the trees in the garden and to the corn in the barns. Language has also preserved something of the old belief. Even in scientific works plants are said to "breathe"; in other words, to perform just that function the exercise of which provided early man with visible proof of his belief in the existence of the soul. We are all accustomed to say that a vine "weeps" or "bleeds" when it has been cut. We remember the question of the little Walter Tell.

"Father, the trees upon the mountain side,
Do they in truth shed blood, when the bright axe
Has cleft their bark?"

Thus a belief was actually current at Nauders in Tyrol fifty years ago that a certain kind of larch tree bled when it was felled. The Indian legal code of Manu forbids the use of red resin, apparently, as has been stated, because it was thought to be coagulated blood, which was no more to be tasted than any other kind of blood. (There was a widespread belief—instances may be found, for example, in the Old Testament—that the soul was inherent in the blood as well as in the breath: the soul appears to depart from the body when the blood streams from a mortal wound.) There is a belief current in Berg that a certain orchis gives a piteous cry when torn out of the ground. But the mysterious rustling of leaves in the wind is especially regarded as the language of the tree, which would be silent if it were not in some way inhabited by a soul.) Speaking trees are

common among the most various nations, the Zulus and the Greeks, the Scandinavians and the Babylonians, etc. Among the Germans the power of understanding their language is part of the poetic faculty. But poets are merely the heirs of those divinely gifted persons born under a happy star, who have been invariably thought by popular belief to have ears for the message told by the rustling of the leaves. Even in modern superstition—and the superstition of to-day was the belief of yesterday—female curiosity occasionally applies to a tree spirit or dryad for valuable information. In Franconia, on St. Thomas' Day, the girls go to a tree, knock upon it three times with due solemnity, and listen for answering knocks within telling them what sort of husbands they will get. The tree spirits are widely believed to possess knowledge of all kinds of secret matters. The poet's assertion, however,

"This would I gladly carve on every stem,"

gives a wrong idea of the spirit's inoffensiveness. Greater caution is necessary: many a Greek or Indian legend relates how the tree spirit betrayed secrets confided to it. Even to-day the belief is well known that the cracking of wooden wall panels is a sign of an approaching death, a belief proceeding from the same idea that the tree spirit is ever ready to reveal to man its knowledge of the future which is hidden from man. But this spirit has the faculty of belief as well as of knowledge. Tradition represents Mohammed as saying of trees, "Some of them are believers, others are unfaithful." Finally, experience must have taught man from the earliest ages that the consumption of such plants, for instance, as contain opium produced a certain mental excitement, for which he could only account by assuming the operation of a soul or spirit. Hence he inferred that the soul or spirit was primarily incarnate in the plant which he had eaten. The expressions of this

belief remain to us, though their original meaning has been changed: we speak of "spirits of wine," the French, of "*esprit de vin*," and the Germans, of the "*Weingeist*." The strength and growth of a plant depend upon the soul incarnate within it. The Karenes in Further India have a special form of invocation adapted to cases when their rice fields fail: "Oh, come, Rice-kelah (spirit), come! Come into the field! Come to the rice! Come from the west, come from the east! Come from the throat of the bird, from the pouches of the ape, from the throat of the elephant. . . . Come from all the barns. Oh, Rice-kelah, come to the rice." As intended to secure the return of the soul, this invocation corresponds precisely with the form of expression which we apply to human beings: "he recovered, and came to himself."

SOULS IN OTHER MATERIAL OBJECTS

The belief in plant souls is more intelligible to us than the belief that objects which we regard as entirely inanimate possess souls. Yet there is no doubt that these beliefs were equally prevalent among primitive tribes. In any case, there is every reason for the existence of this idea, if our explanation is correct, which stated that man was chiefly led to the conception of soul-life by his dream experiences. In dreams he sees many objects far remote from his sleeping place, as he may easily convince himself in waking moments: hence, these things as seen in dreams must be the mysterious doubles of their realities. Weapons, as is generally known, are laid in the grave with dead warriors that the dead may have them for their journey into the beyond, or to the Elysian fields. It is immediately obvious that the uncivilised man who buries these objects does not

imagine that the implements which he lays in the grave can leave it and accompany their owner into the next world: it is, so to speak, only the souls of these objects which follow the dead man. But this idea is not confined to uncivilised man. In ancient Athens, with its famous culture, if a man was killed by a falling stone, a special court was held to pass sentence upon the offending object, which was condemned and transported beyond the frontier! Such action is only explicable upon the supposition that the stone was believed to have a soul. In any case, these examples will suffice to explain what I have termed the second idea necessarily antecedent to a belief in metempsychosis, the idea that organisms other than human, and even objects which we regard as inanimate, may possess souls after the manner of mankind.

CHAPTER III

THE BELIEF IN THE TRANSMIGRATION OF SOULS FROM ONE BEING TO ANOTHER

TRANSMIGRATION FROM MAN TO MAN

WE now proceed to consider the third "antecedent idea," the idea that the soul of one being may be transferred to another being, and thus we are brought face to face with the subject of our enquiry. Evidence for the existence of this belief may be found, for instance, in the well-known Roman custom which obliged the nearest relation to bend over the face of a dying man in order to catch his last breath, in other words, his soul. A similar custom is said to have existed among a tribe in Florida (North America); if a woman died in child-birth, the child was held over her face so that it might breathe in the soul as

it left her lips. Among the same tribe pregnant women were accustomed to go and meet funeral processions in the hope of receiving within themselves the soul of the deceased, for the benefit of the unborn child: the Algonquin Indians used to bury the bodies of children by the roadside that their souls might enter the bodies of passing women and so be born again. For the same reason the Calabaris, the finest and most highly civilised negroes of the slave coast, buried their dead in their houses; the soul of a dead man thus buried was thought to pass into the child that was next born in the house. The belief that the soul of a dead man reappears in a child is widely spread. It is possible that some trace of it existed even among the ancient Babylonians. On this belief the Tibetans certainly base the principle of succession to the supreme spiritual dignity; on the death of the Dalai-Lama, a child born nine months afterwards is chosen as his successor, and is

naturally regarded as a child of the same spirit as the deceased. This, indeed, is the essential point of the belief in the transmigration of the soul from man to man; the belief explains the reason for an intellectual or physical likeness between two men, and in particular the reason for family likenesses. Among the Khonds, an aboriginal Indian tribe, a birth is celebrated seven days after its occurrence by a festival at which the priest examines the body of the child, and states which of the family ancestors has been reborn in it: the child is then named after this ancestor. The naming of children, in fact, is in many ways connected with the belief that the souls of ancestors return to life in the children. In New Zealand, for instance, the priests stand before a new-born child and repeat a long list of ancestral names until the child sneezes or cries out at one of them: the ancestor is thus found whose soul is reincarnated in the child and after whom the

child is then named. A very similar custom exists in Little Popo in colonial West Africa : when a child is born the parents consult the oracle by means of sixteen date-stones, in order to discover whether a soul from the mother's or father's side of the family is reincarnate in the child, and which soul it is. The reply of the oracle determines the name of the child, who thus receives the name of the ancestor whose soul is supposed to have returned again to earth. Not until their conversion to Christianity do we find that the ancient Germans gave a child the name of a living relative ; in earlier times the name of a dead man was always chosen, and especially of a dead father, as he was supposed to continue his life in his child. In Dahomey, if a child was born with a complete set of teeth, the chief magician explained the event as being a reincarnation of the king, who had returned to devour his son, and the child was drowned. The famous Australian

traveller, George Grey, relates that he was once caressed by an old woman who thought that she had found a deceased son in him, and shed tears over him. Here a further feature appears: savages often believe white men to be merely reincarnated members of their own race. "Who dies a black man rises again a white man," is said to be a common saying among the aborigines of Australia.

I do not propose to discuss the unpleasant question, whether the motive of cannibalism is a similar belief, in distorted form, that intellectual powers may be transmitted from man to man by a transmigration of the soul; the theory of the cannibal being that the conqueror who devours his defeated foe thus appropriates the strength, courage, dexterity, etc., which lived in the soul of his enemy. This indication of the belief will suffice.

FROM BEING TO BEING

THE TRANSMIGRATION OF SOULS FROM MEN TO ANIMALS

In every case hitherto discussed we saw that the human soul after death was thought to pass into another human body. The soul can, however, choose a body with no similarity to its original home. This belief in reincarnation under various forms may have been suggested by the facts of nature as observed by primitive man, who must, for instance, have noticed how the caterpillar became a butterfly. Why should not man undergo a similar change?

> "We are but worms
> Born to become celestial butterflies,"

says Dante. It seems again that men's minds were occupied in early times by the thought expressed by St. Paul in the words, "That which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body which shall be, but bare grain, it may be of wheat or of some other grain, but God gives it a body as it

pleases Him " (1 Cor. xv, 37 f.). Seeing that primitive man was unable to draw a clear line of distinction between the worlds of men and of animals, we can hardly feel surprised at the universality of the belief that the human soul can be reincarnated in animals. Instances are legion. Every reader will recall the constant transformations of men into animals in classical mythology or in Grimm's fairy tales. Magicians and witches have a special power of assuming animal forms themselves, or of thus transforming others, perhaps ultimately to restore their original shapes. These temporary transformations or " metamorphoses " do not, however, specially concern us here. They are of interest merely as proving the ease with which simple imaginative powers can accept the possibility of transformation from one to another form of life. Our point is much rather the reason for the belief that the human soul could pass into another species of body after death.

Here we may again refer to Dante's phrase above mentioned, the "celestial butterfly." In the plastic arts this idea had long been a commonplace. In ancient Greece representations of the soul as a butterfly are common enough. How far the Greeks regarded these merely as pictorial or typical representations, how far, that is, they regarded the soul as actually incarnate in the winged insect, is a question that will naturally occur to us. As regards antiquity, it is hardly a suitable question, for it may be said in general that the ancient world was unable to make that distinction between the symbolical and the actual which is perfectly familiar to modern thought. (This observation, it may be said, will also apply to Matt. xxvi, 26.) Anyone who now looks at the mosaic butterflies on the ascent to the Campo Santo at Florence will at once realise that these butterflies are not copies, but types of the human soul after death. In one Irish district popular belief actually

regards the souls of "the grandfathers" as incarnate in the butterflies: in Sweden the name for butterfly is "old woman's soul." In Germany there is a saying that children before birth fly about with the butterflies. The conception of the soul in the form of a butterfly readily leads to the very widespread belief that souls take the form of birds. The Iroquois of North America, for instance, release a bird upon the evening of a burial, in the belief that it will become the home of the soul; other instances of this custom are numerous, though it is impossible to determine in every case whether these soul-birds do more than typify the departure and the upward journey of the liberated soul. The ancient Egyptians, for instance, placed soul-birds with their dead, though they did not believe that their life in the next world was to continue under the form of birds. A curious point is also that the bird was invariably a cock: the dwellers in the next

world were regarded as male without exception, even if they had been women in this world. In Finnish the name for the milky way is the "way of birds": the souls of the dead are apparently thought to fly along the milky way into the next world in the form of birds. In the story of Cinderella we remember the white bird which sits upon the tree over her mother's grave and throws down whatever she desires. The white bird may be regarded as the soul of the mother in bird-form: in fact, the mother had promised on her death-bed to stay with Cinderella and help her. In Venice, among the famous pigeons in the Square of St. Mark, is a particular white bird, which is said to be the soul of Daniele Manin, the great patriot, whom the gondoliers call their father. This white pigeon is said to return every year and to fly over the piazza di San Marco at midnight to behold its beloved Venice. In Cornwall, on the other hand, King Arthur is said to live in

the form of a raven. There is a kindlier legend in the Irish district of Mayo which believes that the souls of maidens become reincarnate in swans. However, in the wild Gieritz swamp on the Aar, in Switzerland, old maids become plovers. The Samoan islanders prefer smaller creatures: should an islander be killed in battle or drowned his friends and relations sit down, spread out a cloth before them, call upon the gods, and wait for some insect to crawl upon the cloth. When an ant, cricket, or some insect of the kind appears it is regarded as the soul of the young man, and is buried with all due solemnity. If no insect appears it is assumed that the spirit is angry with the watchers, others take their places, and an insect naturally appears sooner or later.

The soul shows a particular preference for the form of the snake. In this form it can even leave the body during sleep: an instance is the story of King Guntram, which throws much light upon primitive

ideas concerning the soul. One day the king went to sleep upon the breast of his faithful servant. The servant then saw a little creature like a snake crawl out of his master's mouth and go towards a brook, which it could not cross. The servant placed his sword over the water; the reptile crossed and went into a mountain on the other side. After some time it returned to the sleeper the same way, who soon woke and said that in his dream he had crossed an iron bridge and entered a mountain full of gold. As the counterpart of this story we may quote Virgil's description of the visit of Æneas to his father's grave. Æneas, in due performance of pious custom, had poured libations to the dead of wine, milk, and blood, had strewn flowers and called upon him:

"Then from the depths of the shrine came smoothly gliding a serpent,
Winding its mighty length in sevenfold circles entwined;

Slowly it circled the tomb and wound its way to the altars,
Azure bedight was its back and the spangled scales of the portent
Glittered with verdant gold, as the bow after rain in the heavens
Gleams with a thousand hues beneath the touch of the sunbeam.
Silent, amazed stood Æneas; but the serpent, its long length trailing,
Glided among the cups and the polished vessels of service,
Tasted the viands and back to the depths of the tomb receded,
Mindless of harm and left the tasted food and the altars."—ÆNEID V, 84–93.

Greek vase paintings frequently represent the occupants of graves in the form of snakes. This does not imply the belief that the dead continued to live permanently in serpent form, but merely that their souls could become visible in this form from time to time. Zulu simplicity, on the other hand, regards the snake-form as permanent: if a snake appears with a scar on one side a man may come who knew some inhabitant of the place thus marked in his life-time

and say, " That is So-and-so. Do you not see the scar on his side ? " That primitive man regarded the serpent as an uncanny, supernatural creature is a matter of common knowledge. This is probably the chief reason for regarding the serpent as the form in which the souls of the dead continued their existence : for fear is the first feeling that inspires man's relations with the dead, as may be proved from many sources. It should also be remembered that in many countries snakes are fond of entering houses and approaching the fireside, as though they were driven by some natural instinct to seek human association. Legend often represents the house-snake as playing with the child of the house, as sharing food and drink with him, sleeping in his cradle and giving him health : but the snake must not be angered, or evil will fall upon the household.

The belief is widely disseminated that human souls are incarnate in animals

which make their homes in men's houses, even when they are unwelcome visitors. The mouse, for instance, very often appears as the reincarnation of a soul. The soul can leave the body of a sleeper in the form of a mouse as well as in that of a snake, to return after a while to the body: the mouse is a form more regularly assumed after death. In the year 914 there was a great famine, and Bishop Hatto of Mayence gathered the poor who had nothing to eat into a barn and burnt them: then a swarm of mice suddenly came out of the fire—these were, of course, the souls of the unfortunate people demanding vengeance—and pursued the bishop day and night. He fled to a tower in the middle of the Rhine at Bingen to escape his foes, but they swam the stream and devoured him, whence his tower is known as the "mouse-tower" even to-day. Mice also have their patron saint, St. Gertrude, who is represented in the Carinthian's peasant calendar as a spinning

woman, with mice and rats running up her distaff. The explanation of so strange an attribute of the saint is simply this: Gertrude was formerly one of the war Valkyries, and souls spent their first night after death with her: thus the mice depicted with the saint are merely the reincarnated souls of the deceased. Hence the saying "to whistle to mice is to call the souls of the dead": we may compare the legend of the piper of Hameln. Arab superstition regards a particular species of mouse as inhabited by the souls of an extinct Israelitish tribe: hence these mice will not touch camel's milk, which was forbidden to the Israelites. Together with the mouse, mention may also be made of toads, which in Tyrol, for instance, may not be killed on All Souls' Day, "because poor souls are in them"; they also, like poor souls, make pilgrimages to chapels on quarter days.

Certain uncanny creatures which fly by night are often regarded as the habitations

of souls; such are the owl, the bat, and especially the vampire, which has a particularly evil reputation for sucking the warm blood from the living and leaving them pale and dying. The so-called vampire legend is to be found chiefly among the Slav races. The Abipones, an Indian tribe in the Argentine, have a less repulsive belief, to the effect that the souls of the dead become incarnate in a certain species of duck, which flies about at night uttering melancholy wails. The mournful effect of these cries is the reason in this case for assuming a connection between these birds and the souls of the dead. Mohammed refused to eat lizards because he regarded them as the descendants of an Israelitish tribe which had undergone this metamorphosis: the Zulus also believe that the souls of the dead can pass into lizards. More intelligible is the idea that souls enter animals resembling man in form: in Guinea, souls are thought to enter the bodies of the

apes which live in the neighbourhood of the burial places. The general respect and fear of the dead is expressed in the belief that their souls inhabit the bodies of animals of imposing appearance: tigers, lions, bears, wolves, even crocodiles and whales. But almost any animal may be so inhabited. When the head of a great fish was placed on the table before Theodoric, King of the Ostrogoths, in his palace at Ravenna, he cried trembling, " That is Symmachus (who had been executed by his orders); he wishes to devour me." He then fell ill and died. An Icelandic legend relates that Pharaoh's servants who were drowned in the Red Sea continue to live beneath the sea in the form of seals. On the eve of St. John they are allowed to resume their human shape, and come to land dancing and singing joyfully. If anyone can take away their seal skins, he has them in his power, and they remain in the form of men.

In some instances the various kinds of animals are differentiated. Those hostile to man are regarded as inhabited by the souls of enemies, while the inoffensive contain the souls of members of the tribe. Thus the Tlascalans of Mexico believe that the souls of distinguished men enter great and sweet-singing birds and the nobler quadrupeds, while the souls of common people pass into weasels, beetles, etc. Similarly, the tribes of Madagascar believe that the species of animal to be inhabited by the soul is determined by the rank which the deceased man held during his lifetime.

SOUL-TRANSMIGRATION FROM MEN TO PLANTS

After death the human soul can pass into plants as well as into animals. The soul seems to show a particular preference for the bean. Hence the Pythagoreans were forbidden to eat beans. "To eat beans is to eat the heads of one's parents" was a

Pythagorean saying, which was intended to be literally interpreted. Horace pours full measure of satire upon Pythagoras, the "relative" of the bean, in reference to a succulent country dish of beans (Satire II, vi, 63 ff.). The black marks in the bean flower were interpreted by the Greeks as Ai, Ai, the cry of sorrow; a similar sign was found by them in the hyacinth, which flower was also regarded as an incarnation. At the same time the bean had an evil reputation as causing bad dreams. Beans, in fact, have a history of their own: the Romans had a similar belief concerning them; they thought that they drove away evil spirits by throwing beans behind them. This may remind us of a feast which the Japanese celebrate on the evening of February 25 at the parting of winter and spring. They try to drive out malicious spirits by strewing roasted beans and exclaiming: "Come in, happiness, go away, devil!" Egyptian priests were not even allowed to

look at beans. At any rate, we know that he "who is in the beans" is absent-minded, i.e. that as beans can contain the soul of the dead, so they can hold the mind of a living man. There is much evidence to show that All Souls' Day and the spring festival originally fell upon the same day. The spring festival in Malta, for instance, and on the Rhine, was therefore kept as a bean festival. It was a time of rejoicing. A bean queen, the feminine counterpart of Prince Carnival, was chosen, and cheerful, licentious songs were sung; hence the origin of the German expression that any licentious and outrageous act "surpasses the bean-song."

Apart from leguminous plants, any tree or shrub may receive the passing soul. The Dyaks of Borneo, for instance, believe that the sap, with its resemblance to blood, is due to this cause, and for similar reasons certain tribes in Australia or the Philippines refuse to fell trees. In this connection must be taken the numerous stories of transforma-

tions to trees in classical mythology; such as that of Philemon and Baucis, who were transformed upon death into an oak and a lime tree respectively. Comparatively recently the two sacred trees were shown, protected by a wall from the profane world. A large number of similar legends and stories are current, such as the wonderful old folk-song:

> "They buried him in Mary's church
> And her in Mary's nave,
> And over her a red rose grew
> And a white thorn from his grave:
> They bent to one another,
> Entwined their branches fair,
> For every passer-by to see
> Two lovers rested there."

More elaborate is the Portuguese story of Count Nello, from whose grave a cypress grew, while an orange tree blossomed upon the grave of his lady-love, the Infanta. The King, who had opposed their marriage, ordered the trees to be cut down. But blood flowed from their stems and two

white doves flew out and away to the King, as he was sitting down to meat, so that he burst out with a cry, "Curse your love, curse it: neither in life nor in death can I divide you."

Such beliefs are now regarded as nothing more than poetical ideas, but in the far distant day of primitive speculation, from which poets have transmitted these stories to us, they were considered to be matters of fact. So much is plainly obvious from time to time even through the veil of poetical treatment. A case in point is Virgil's account of Æneas' discovery of a cornel tree and a branching myrtle plant upon a grave. Æneas goes up and attempts to root up the plant, purposing to adorn the altar with the green shoots. But the roots drip black blood, and when Æneas has torn up the third root, he hears a piteous cry from the depths of the mound: the soul of Polydorus, who was slain by Achilles, cries for mercy. An Annamite story tells of a fisher-

man who made a gash in a tree trunk which had drifted ashore. Blood streams forth, and it appears that an empress and her three daughters who had been thrown into the sea had been reincarnated in the tree. The Abyssinians assert that at the spot where a maiden buried her seven brothers seven palm trees grew from their bones. Here we observe that the soul creates for itself the tree which is to be its future habitation : on the other hand, many other races, such as the Slavs, believe that the fruit trees in the garden receive the soul of a member of the family upon his death. Fancy carries the thread of the story yet further; from the wood of one of these trees the cradle is made, which is to contain a new life : does not the soul of the ancestor thus return to the grandson or the great-grandson ?

We have already referred to the belief that the soul is contained in the blood. In full correspondence with this idea is the

fact that belief in the migration of souls to plants occasionally occurs in another form, which regards plants as developed from drops of blood. Thus the Greeks believed that the anemone sprang from the blood of the dying Adonis. A legend from the Armenian town of Erzeroum states that the tulip first grew from the blood of the dying Ferdad at the spot where he threw himself from the rocks in despair for his rejected love. Even the red poppies upon the battlefield of Waterloo are regarded by popular belief as springing from the blood of the brave warriors who fell in the battle.

SOUL-TRANSMIGRATION FROM MAN TO INANIMATE OBJECTS

Primitive thought regards objects which we consider inanimate as no less capable of possessing souls after the nature of man than animals and plants: hence we need feel no surprise at the belief that mortal souls can pass into inanimate objects. The

most frequent form of this belief regards the soul of a deceased man as inhabiting an image erected to him, or as present especially in his picture or statue. In this connection we may refer to the common fact, that the ordinary believer regards the image before which he kneels as personifying the being which he there adores. An infinite number of examples might be quoted, from the ancient Tyrians, who put fetters upon the statue of their sun god to prevent him from leaving their town, to the Russian peasant of the present day, who blindfolds his ikon that it may not see him commit an unrighteous act. In fact, a mere stone may serve as a habitation for the departing soul. Primitive simplicity can have seen no greater difficulty in accepting this idea than in believing its contrary, that men were originally born from stones. This latter belief is to be found among the Greeks, as everyone is aware; strangely enough, it exists in remarkably similar form among

the South American tribe of the Tamanakes on the Orinoco. More familiar to us are the stories to be found in every country of men turned into stones: these are popular explanations of the existence of rocks showing some resemblance to the human form. A more striking example of the belief that the human soul can pass into an inanimate object is provided by China with its belief that the soul (or more correctly, one of the three souls) of an ancestor enters the tablet erected to his memory by his family. Here the departed relative receives the veneration of his descendants, and is informed of their joys and sorrows: if, for instance, there is a marriage in the household, the head of the family burns incense before the tablet, pours libations of wine to it, reads the announcement of the betrothal before it, and eventually burns it in that spot, in order to give the message a form in greater congruity, so to say, with the position of the deceased.

FROM BEING TO BEING

A large number of the examples which we have hitherto quoted in illustration of the belief that the human soul can be reincarnated in another human body, or in some non-human organism, might well be considered as examples of metempsychosis proper. But this term is perhaps more correctly restricted to cases where we find a connected series of transmigrations, where, in other words, the life of an individual forms but one link in a chain of reincarnations; it is more satisfactory to regard, as we have done, the belief in isolated instances of metempsychosis as the most important of the antecedent beliefs presupposed by the idea of metempsychosis proper. Thus, in the preceding pages, our instances have been purposely chosen from the most different races and climates: for the very diversity of our sources of information should arouse the impression that the belief in metempsychosis was not confined to any one race or group of races, but was

the common property of mankind. The study of comparative religion or of comparative philosophy, if undertaken from the historical point of view, must leave us profoundly impressed with the fact, that the further we retrace early theories of life and of nature, the greater is the similarity which such theories display: whereas if we follow the development of these ideas from their source downwards, an increasing tendency to diverge is constantly apparent. Hence the antecedent ideas necessary to the belief in the transmigration of souls, in the restricted sense of the term, are to be found throughout the world. Why, then, did not the belief in metempsychosis become universal? To produce this result a further condition was required; the belief in metempsychosis in its proper sense can only begin at a particular stage of intellectual development, and, moreover, can only arise among peoples possessing that special disposition to compare facts and make

deductions from them, which is necessary to the development of any such belief as this. The Semitic peoples, for instance, were far too realistic in their mode of thought for the belief in metempsychosis to take root among them. Such traces of the theory as may be found among them are due to foreign influence.

PART II

METEMPSYCHOSIS PROPERLY SO CALLED

CHAPTER I

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

SO far as we know, there are but three peoples who may be considered as typically representative of the belief in metempsychosis in the proper sense of the term; the Indians, the Greeks, and the Celts. We have disregarded instances based upon inadequate evidence: thus the Bishop of Cracow, Vincent Kadlubek (died 1223) states in his Polish chronicle that a foolish belief was universally entertained by the Getæ (by whom he elsewhere means the Prussians) to the effect that souls which leave men's bodies return again in new-born bodies, and that many souls become bestial by assuming animal forms; this evidence seems to me to be somewhat unreliable. Another and probably more notice-

able omission will be that of the Egyptians, who would perhaps occur to the casual reader as soon as he heard the term metempsychosis mentioned. We may be referred to a famous passage in the Greek historian Herodotus, in which he says: "now the Egyptians are the first who have affirmed the opinion that the human soul is immortal, and that when the body decays the soul invariably enters another body upon the point of birth. When it has thus successively passed through the bodies of all the animals on earth, in the water, and in the air, it returns once more into a human body upon the point of birth, and this circle of migrations it completes in three thousand years." As it happens, a large number of inscriptions have provided tolerably complete information concerning the true nature of Egyptian ideas upon the condition of the soul after death, and the observations of Herodotus, as above quoted, remain unconfirmed. It is true that in certain chap-

ters of the so-called Book of the Dead, the soul is credited with the capacity of transforming itself upon occasion into other beings, and of taking the form of a golden sparrow-hawk, of a lily, of a sacred ram, of a crocodile, etc. But in these cases it must be carefully remembered that the transformation is not due to any natural law to which the soul concerned is subjected, but is rather represented as a special privilege which may be conceded at times to the souls of skilful magicians; nor does the statement imply more than an attempt to secure greater sanctity for the dwellers in the next world by providing them with unusual powers of self-transformation. On the other hand, the doctrine of metempsychosis in its strict form invariably regards reincarnation as the inevitable destiny of the human soul; liberation from this necessity is the great ideal and hope of the soul, and is considered to be, at most, the more or less remote goal of a toilsome

course of self-redemption. The succession of these reincarnations is determined by existing theories upon moral retribution or religious and ethical purification : so much will be apparent when we consider the beliefs of the Indians and Greeks, among whom metempsychosis assumed its classical form.

CHAPTER II

METEMPSYCHOSIS AMONG THE CELTS

OUR knowledge of the Celtic religion in general is extremely vague, and of Celtic ideas upon metempsychosis we know very little. Cæsar, however, in his De Bello Gallico (VI, xiv, 4) tells us that the Druids — the Celtic priests — believed that the soul did not die, but passed from one individual to another: they regarded this belief as a great stimulus to morality of life and felt no fear of death. A somewhat later writer, Diodorus Siculus, says, when describing the Gauls, that at meals they would often dispute about trifles and challenge one another to duels, "for of the end of life they make no account. In fact, the opinion of Pythagoras (see below) prevails among them, that the souls of men are

immortal, and come to life again after a certain term of years, entering other bodies " (V, xxviii). However, the value of this statement is considerably modified by the author's following words: " upon the occasion of a burial, many cast letters upon the funeral pile, which they have written to their dead friends, in the hope that the dead will read them." A somewhat later statement by the historian Valerius Maximus (II, vi, 10) says that the Gauls lend one another inconceivably large sums of money on the mere promise of repayment in the next world. These customs would rather incline us to believe that the dead had to expect a common life beyond the grave, and not reincarnation for another life upon earth. Accordingly, the observations of the ancient historians upon Celtic belief in metempsychosis are to be accepted with caution, nor should I venture to give a definite list of the successive reincarnations in which the Celts believed, as other writers

have attempted to do upon the evidence of other and even more doubtful statements. At any rate, the words of a famous sixth century bard upon his own reincarnations are sufficiently definite. He asserts that he became a lynx, a dog, and a stag, then a spade, an axe, a cock, a stallion, and a goat, and finally a grain of corn, which was swallowed by a hen. The question has also been raised whether these beliefs were indigenous and common to all Celtic tribes: it has been conjectured that individual Druids borrowed them from Greek colonists. To these questions no final answer can as yet be given.

CHAPTER III

METEMPSYCHOSIS IN INDIA

VEDIC-BRAHMAN BELIEFS

INDIA is the country in which the belief in the transmigration of souls has chiefly flourished. Opinions concerning the date of its first appearance are divergent. I am inclined to think that the date can well be placed at a very early period, although the oldest monuments of the so-called Vedic literature show very scanty traces of the belief. However, an early Indian code requires that upon the occasion of a sacrifice a fragment of the offering to the departed spirits should also be thrown to the birds, "because we are taught that our fathers glide along, taking the form of birds." For our purpose, an acquaintance with the classical form of Indian metempsychosis

will suffice. The conception is obviously dominated by the idea of moral retribution. In the Indian collection of fairy tales, the Pancatantra, to which we have already referred, the difference between a king and a god is marked: the king can reward good or bad actions at the time of their commission, while the god can only give rewards or punishments upon the occasion of a reincarnation. As regards the nature of these rewards, it may be said, in brief, that a man becomes the mirror of his deeds. This fact is vividly stated by the famous legal code of Manu, the essential parts of which are pre-Buddhist and represent Brahman ideals. Thus a Brahman or priest who asks for gifts for an offering and does not use them all for the purpose stated becomes a vulture or crow (XI, 25): for vultures and crows may be said to live by abstracting food. The reasons for special forms of rebirth are not always so obvious as in this case: nor do we always know what moral

conceptions the Indians applied to particular animals. If, for instance, we examine the list of punishments for theft, we find (XII, 61–69): "he who from greed steals precious stones, pearls, corals, or other valuables, will be born a goldsmith (the name of a bird): he who steals gold will become a rat . . . he who steals honey, a stinging insect, he who steals milk, a crow, he who steals sugar-cane juice, a dog; the thief of butter becomes an ichneumon, of meat, a vulture, of lard, a heron, of oil, a winged stag-beetle, of salt, a cricket, of sour milk, a Balaka bird, of silk, a partridge, of flax, a frog, of cotton, a crane, of a cow, an iguana (a species of lizard), of syrup, a flying fox, of scent, a musk rat, of green vegetables, a peacock, of any cooked food, a porcupine, of uncooked food, a hedgehog, of fire, a heron, of household utensils, a wasp, of bright coloured clothes, a guinea fowl, of a stag or elephant, a wolf, of a horse, a tiger, of roots and fruit, an ape,

of a woman, a bear, of water, a black and white cuckoo, of a cart, a camel, of cattle, a he-goat. He who deprives another of his property by force or eats sacrificial offerings of which no sacrifice has been made, undoubtedly becomes an animal. Women who commit theft bear corresponding guilt and become the females of the animals above enumerated."

Elsewhere in the same code the punishment appointed for a faithless wife is to become a jackal after death (V, 164, IX, 30), while if she is faithful to her husband during his life or after his death she will have the privilege of union with him after death. Further (XII, 55 ff.), he who kills a Brahman, after a long progress through dreadful hells, is to be reborn as a dog, pig, ass, camel, cow, goat, sheep, stag, bird, etc. The soul of the Brahman who is addicted to forbidden drink enters the bodies of great and small insects, moths, carrion-eating birds, and destructive animals. Men who take

pleasure in inflicting pain become carnivorous animals; those who eat forbidden food become worms; thieves become creatures which devour their own kind (such as fish, etc.). The worst fate is reserved for those who commit adultery with the wife of a priest or teacher (the so-called deadly sin in the legal code); their souls are to return hundreds of times into grass, shrubs, creeping animals, carnivorous animals with claws and cruel dispositions. Generally speaking, the opinion naturally prevails that the threatened reincarnation is not a final punishment, but is merely the prelude to another birth, so that the series extends through an infinity of time; the code speaks of successive migrations through ten thousand millions of lives! (VI, 63).

It is immediately obvious that dogmas of this kind are not the pure result of simple popular belief: we see the handiwork of an educated priesthood, for so complex a system could only have been the result of

comparison and inference. The code of Manu is the first attempt to systematise the world of living things and to subordinate the several classes of life. The direction to be followed by the soul on its migrations is then determined as threefold, according as the man by his deeds has fitted himself for the world of gods, of men, or of animals. Within these three worlds different grades are distinguished. In the animal world, for instance, the lowest species are those without powers of locomotion: then come the small and great insects, the snakes, and tortoises; on a higher plane are elephants, horses, lions, tigers, and boars; highest of all are certain mythological animals. It must also be noticed that among these animals, as if they were upon the same level, are placed men of despised castes and savages: so relative is the value placed on human life as such. The theologians, the penitents, the sacrificers, and the learned are placed highest in the human

scale by this religion, which fact suffices to betray its priestly origin.

This doctrine as set forth in Manu's code, which teaches that man receives retribution for his misdeeds by becoming what they are, has been well criticised by Herder as follows: "how lightly does the cruel man suffer for his cruelty, if his soul enters the body of a tiger. The former tiger in human shape now becomes the reality untroubled by conscience or the sense of duty, which pricked him at times in his former state. Now he may rage and mangle as hunger, thirst, and appetite bid him, at the promptings of an instinct which only now can be satiated. Such was the desire of the human tiger. Instead of punishment, he receives reward. He is what he wished to be and what he was but very imperfectly while in human shape."

Later Brahman theology apparently displayed a tendency to connect the souls of the departed with the waning and waxing

moon. The so-called Upanishads, the philosophical scriptures, which Paul Deussen, their translator, declared to be to the Vedas what the New Testament is to the Bible, state, "all who leave this world go directly to the moon. By their lives its waxing crescent is increased, and by means of its waning it brings them to second birth. But the moon is also the gate of the heavenly world, and he who can answer the questions of the moon is allowed to pass beyond it. He who can give no answer is turned to rain by the moon and rained down upon the earth. He is born again here below, as worm or fly, or fish or bird, or lion, or boar or animal with teeth, or tiger, or man, or anything else in one or another place, according to his works and to his knowledge. So when a man comes to the moon, the moon asks him, who art thou? If he answers rightly, the moon allows him to pass onward, and he comes to the world of fire, then to the world of wind, then to the world of gods," etc.

While these words give us the impression of a course of development gradually rising to higher planes, within the same literature the round of transmigrations is sometimes represented as a circle, as in the lines :

"His mother that was becomes his wife :
His wife that was becomes his mother :
His father becomes his son,
And his son, again, becomes his father.
Thus in the circle of the Samsara,*
Like as the buckets upon the wheel
Revolve, so turns he ever backwards
To his mother's breast and to his birth."

BUDDHIST BELIEFS

Buddhism inherited the Brahman belief in metempsychosis. The use of the term, however, in speaking of Buddhism is of questionable legitimacy, for Buddhism does not accept that which we have termed the first necessary condition antecedent to a belief in the transmigration of souls, the existence of a personal soul. Buddhism directly rejects this conception, and for it

* i.e. course of migration.

there is no real ego: it admits only the existence of independent spiritual phenomena in constant succession. Thus it compares what we call the soul with a flame which reproduces itself every moment and feeds upon itself meanwhile, and the individual life is but a light which has been kindled at another light. The combustible matter is provided by human action; by action man creates matter for further existence and advances towards reincarnation, and this, in Buddhist theory, is so miserable a destiny that man's redemption culminates in the removal of any possibility of reincarnation, that is, in the negation of the human will to act.

A belief in metempsychosis, when there is no belief in the existence of the soul, seems to us an impossible contradiction. Popular Indian theory, however, was not so deeply impressed with the inconsistency. In general, the doubts of the learned concerning the existence of a personal soul have,

perhaps, never been seriously accepted by many people anywhere in the world. Thus the belief in soul-transmigration remained unshaken, and in popular theory even the Buddhists considered that one and the same soul went through the whole round of reincarnations. Buddhist doctrine even taught that he who would attain complete enlightenment must reach the moment when he succeeds in arousing recollection of his former states of existence by means of continued spiritual introspection. That recollection arose in Buddha, and in this respect he became a pattern and example to his followers: "In such a frame of mind, earnest, purified, cleansed, steady, freed from dross, docile, pliable, firm, impregnable, I directed my mind to gain knowledge by recollection of earlier states of existence. I remembered many former states as one life, then as two lives . . . then as a hundred thousand lives: I remembered the times of many creations and many times of

decay, of the world and death . . . there was I, such was my name, such my family, such and such my profession and my rank, such weal and woe did I experience, and such was the end of my life: there after death I re-entered life elsewhere: . . . dead, I re-entered life here. Thus I recalled many different forms of previous existence."

These previous existences of the master became the subject matter of pious legends, which were elaborated to serve the cause of Buddhist ethical theory with all the extravagance native to Indian imaginations. Buddha's special mode of behaviour in all his previous lives was made the pattern to be followed by his devotees in every conceivable situation. Thus the numerous edifying narratives of his reincarnations provide a complete code of moral precepts. As is well known, sympathy is the chief Buddhist virtue. An inspiring example of the practice of sympathy is given, for instance, in the following anecdote. In one

of his previous lives Buddha was incarnate as a hare. It happened one day that a hungry Brahman came and asked him for food. Buddha had nothing to give, but would not send him away empty. What was to be done? "Go," he said, at length, "collect wood and light a fire. I will roast myself and you shall then eat me." His suggestion was carried out. Naturally the poor hare had nothing to lose; he was rewarded for his sympathy by a reincarnation upon a correspondingly higher plane. Opportunity for virtuous action of this kind will eventually come to everyone: for Buddhist imagination did not readily conceive a conclusion to the succession of reincarnations. The number of them seems to be infinite, as may be inferred from the following conversation of Buddha with his disciples. "What think ye, children, whether is greater, the blood that was shed at your beheading upon the long journey from birth to death and from birth to death, or the

water of the four great seas?" "As we understand, oh master, the teaching delivered by the enlightened one, we have shed upon the long journey from birth to death and from birth to death more blood at our beheading than there is water in the four seas." "Good, my children, good is it that ye thus understand the teaching I have delivered to you: more blood, indeed, children, on this long journey, hastening ever from birth to death and from birth again to death, have ye shed at your beheading than there is water in the four seas. For long, ye children, as cattle and calves have ye shed more blood at your beheading than there is water in the four seas; for long, ye children, as buffaloes and buffalo-calves have ye shed more blood at your beheading than there is water in the four seas." Thus the speech continues: it is an excellent example of the general style of Buddhist exhortation, with its circumstantial repetition of each several clause in

a sentence ; it proceeds to treat successively of the reincarnation of men as sheep and lambs, goats and kids, deer and stags, swine and sucking-pigs, fowls, pigeons, geese, etc.

This may suffice as a description of the Indian doctrine of metempsychosis in its classical form: to pursue its progress among the many later sects (such as the famous Sikhs) would lead us beyond the limit of our space.

CHAPTER IV

THE GREEK DOCTRINE OF METEMPSYCHOSIS

WHETHER there was any direct connection between the Indian belief in metempsychosis which we have just described and the Greek doctrine remains an open question. The Greek historian Herodotus thought that his countrymen had borrowed the theory from the Egyptians. This supposition is excluded by the facts we have already stated concerning the Egyptian form of the belief. Historically, it can apparently be demonstrated to have first appeared in Thrace, upon the northern frontier of Greece. To Thrace belongs the legendary figure of the famous singer Orpheus, from whom the mysterious sect of the "Orphici" took their name. Their doctrines are highly coloured by poetical

imagery, but the following are the main points which concern our present investigation: soul and body are united by a compact unequally binding upon either; the soul is divine, immortal, and aspires to freedom, while the body holds it in fetters as a prisoner. Death dissolves this compact, but only to re-imprison the liberated soul after a short time: for the wheel of birth revolves inexorably. "Thus the soul continues its journey, alternating between a separate, unrestrained existence and fresh reincarnation, round the wide circle of necessity, as the companion of many bodies of men and animals" (Erwin Rhode: Psyche). To these unfortunate prisoners Orpheus proclaims the message of liberation, that they stand in need of the grace of redeeming gods and of Dionysus in particular, and calls them to turn to God by ascetic piety of life and self-purification: the purer their lives, the higher will be their next reincarnation, until the soul has

completed the spiral ascent of destiny, to live for ever as God, from whom it comes. The Orphic belief seems to have been widely current in the Greek colonies in southern Italy and Sicily.

We know that southern Italy was also the centre of Pythagoras' influence, the most famous exponent of metempsychosis among the Greeks. Here, again, the probably insoluble question arises, whether or to what extent a connection between the Pythagorean and Orphic teaching may be assumed. As a matter of fact, the theory of the soul adopted by either school of thought shows close affinity. The Pythagoreans also regarded the soul as temporarily imprisoned in the body, which it leaves at death; after a period of purification in the lower world it returns to earth (the Pythagoreans considered the air to be full of souls) and begins a new career in a new body corresponding to its deeds in the former life. Pythagoras himself asserted that he had passed through

four previous earthly lives in human form. He was able even to point out the place in the temple of the goddess Hera, where the shield hung, which he had used during his former life as Euphorbus at the siege of Troy, where he was killed by Menelaus. At a later date his soul entered the body of a cock upon one occasion. These statements exposed him to a considerable amount of ridicule. One of his bitterest mockers, Lucian, represents a certain Mikyllus as asking this cock whether the events of the Trojan war, which the cock must have witnessed as Euphorbus, had actually happened as Homer related them. "What could Homer know of them?" replies the cock: "at that time he was himself a camel in Bactria!"

Many, however, regarded these theories more seriously. It is difficult to say how far the people as a whole were influenced by them, but their effect upon poetry and philosophy was unmistakable: at least

three names in this connection must be mentioned, the poet Pindar, the philosopher Empedocles, and Plato. Pindar considered that the soul must pass through at least three earthly lives before it could escape the compulsion to reincarnation. Upon the last occasion when it was sent to the upper world by the queen of the lower world, it received the privilege of entering the body of a king, hero, or sage. After death the soul went to the Islands of the Blessed, where undisturbed enjoyment awaited it, and was honoured as a hero by men. To the philosopher Empedocles belong the lines which he spoke in reference to himself:

> "Thus in former lives have I been a boy and a girl,
> A bush and a bird and a fish without speech in the depths of the sea."

As this strange fragment of autobiography states, Empedocles extended metempsychosis to the world of plants. Few adherents of the belief have gone to this extreme, even

in India. In Buddhism, for instance, the limitation of metempsychosis to the animal world became a dogma, though only after long discussions of the question. Plato also diverged from the earlier philosopher upon this point: in general, Plato also regarded the soul as passing through several bodies, at least three (as did Pindar), an interval of a thousand years elapsing between each reincarnation. The soul chose its new position in life for itself (this is a point peculiar to Plato), always in accordance with the character which it had acquired during its former existence, so that the soul was "symmetrical" with the body which clothed it. Thus man's moral action ultimately determines whether he rises upwards or sinks to the level of the animal world. The upward path eventually enables him to avoid the necessity of reincarnation and leads him home to the "realm of eternal and untroubled being."

Neo-platonism, so far as metempsychosis

was concerned, followed its master's teaching. Eventually Greek beliefs coloured the less independent philosophical thought of the Romans : especially prominent at Rome was the school of the Sextii, whose doctrines were borrowed from Pythagoreanism ; traces of this school are apparent in the writings of Virgil, who lived about the same time : after a thousand years have completed a cycle of existence for the blessed in Elysium, God summons them in a body to the stream of Lethe, where they drink the waters of oblivion and return to the upper world desiring new births.

CHAPTER V

THE BELIEF IN METEMPSYCHOSIS IN OTHER QUARTERS

IN THE BIBLE AND IN JUDAISM

THE belief in the transmigration of souls continually recurs sporadically even within religions in which such a belief should find no place. Upon the occasion of a public debate I have heard laymen maintain the opinion and support it with numerous Biblical quotations, that both Old and New Testament taught this belief. A quotation regarded as of primary importance is the verse of Psalm xc: "Thou turnest man to destruction, and again Thou sayest, Come again, ye children of men"; St. John ix, 2, the question of the young men, is also quoted: "Master, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born

blind ? " What view are we to take of these passages ? In Psalm xc, 3, Luther's translation is the obvious cause of misconception. Luther uses two different expressions, while in the original text the same word occurs twice : " Thou allowest mankind to return to dust, and sayest, ' Return, ye children of the earth ' " (that is to say, to dust). In other words, both halves of the verse, according to the rule of the so-called " synonymous parallelism," make precisely the same statement, and both refer to Genesis iii, 19, which says that the fate of man is to return to the dust from which he is taken. This is the only interpretation consistent with the general sense of the passage, which is, after all, the important point ; for the poet is only concerned with the contrast between the Everlasting God and the transitory life of man—the creature of a day, who dies by an early death owing to God's anger on account of his sinfulness (V. 7 f.).

As concerns the passage in St. John ix, 2, it has been urged that the supposition of the disciples, who considered that a man might be born blind on account of his own sins, is only intelligible upon the assumption that the person concerned had passed through a previous state of existence in which he had committed the sins in question. This conclusion can hardly be avoided, and we must therefore assume that the full force of these words and their general implication were not realised by the disciples at the moment when they put their question to Jesus, or by the writer who puts it in their mouths. In any case, it may readily be conceded that the Judaism of that age, notwithstanding its exclusiveness, had not entirely escaped the overwhelming influence of Greek intellectualism, and was therefore by no means entirely ignorant of the theory that souls existed before their incarnation in bodies, though this would not of itself justify the supposition that any universal

belief in metempsychosis existed. For instance, the so-called " wisdom of Solomon " represents King Solomon as saying : " For I was a witty child and had a good spirit ; yea, rather, being good, I came into a body undefiled " (Ch. viii, 19 f.). During the early days of Christianity similar ideas may be found in Rabbinical literature. The Rabbis, for instance, occasionally state that all human souls which were to enter human bodies up to the time of the Messiah had existed even before the Creation. In the infinite past they had remained in a kind of store-house, in the seventh heaven, or in the garden of Eden, from which they were brought forth to become incarnate in the human bodies which they were to inhabit. When God requires a soul he gives an order to the angel in charge of this locality, and says to him : " Bring me such and such a soul, called So-and-So, and of such and such an appearance." The angel immediately goes forth and brings the soul before

God. The soul then bows and prostrates itself before the King of kings, but is unwilling to leave the world in which it has hitherto lived for another. Then God says to it: "The world into which I send thee shall be fairer for thee than that in which thou hast lived hitherto." Then the soul enters the body of a mother and receives a promise from the angel that conducts it, that it shall enter Paradise if it keeps God's commandments. The Rabbis certainly and constantly insisted upon the fact that the soul enters the body in a state of purity, but this assertion is in fundamental contradiction to the continual reluctance of the soul before God to exchange the world in which it has lived for another. If this theory concerning the objection of the soul in an earlier state of existence to undergo a change be carried a little further, we shall reach the idea expressed in St. John ix, 2, that actual sin can be committed in a previous state of existence. Nor is it, perhaps,

surprising that no further instances can be adduced from contemporary Jewish literature. The fact, however, remains, as may be seen at the first glance, that the theory of a soul in an earlier state of existence is very far removed from the theory of metempsychosis proper.

Equally impossible is it to regard as inspired by this belief the familiar statements that John the Baptist or Elias or Jeremiah had returned to earth in the person of Jesus (Matt. xvi, 14). Such passages as Matthew xiv, 2, Luke ix, 7 f., demonstrate beyond cavil the fact that this opinion was merely the outcome of that belief in a resurrection which all pious Jews held at the beginning of the Christian era. This belief has been placed in a false perspective by the Jewish historian Josephus, who represented it as peculiar to the Pharisees, in a manner that might seem to show them as accepting a migration of the soul: this, however, is due to his habit, which almost

amounts to mania, of representing the Jewish parties as schools of philosophic thought. He personally, at least, declares his belief that the souls of the righteous, after a sojourn in the holiest part of heaven, may return in undefiled bodies after a certain lapse of time (Jewish War III, viii, 5).

Traces of the Greek doctrine of metempsychosis are also apparent in the works of Philo, a writer representative of Greek Judaism, and an early contemporary of Jesus. He considers that a fall from God is the only reason why the soul is bound to this earthly life, i.e. to the body. The ideal of the soul is to aspire to direct contemplation of the Deity: only the wise and virtuous can attain this object during the earthly life, and success is not complete until after death, when the soul returns to its original incorporeal state. He who cannot avoid the sins of sense is compelled to enter another body after death.

In its entirety, the belief in metempsychosis proper was not adopted before the rise of the Jewish philosophy of the so-called Cabbalists, a much later growth: its doctrine of the "rolling onward of the soul" expresses this belief. "Souls enter the bodies of wild animals, birds, and worms, for"—such is the text quoted to support the assertion—"Jahwe (Jehovah) is the God of the spirits of all flesh" (Num. xxvii, 16), and the man who has committed but one sin shall be transformed into an animal, whatever his good deeds. He who gives a Jew unclean flesh to eat, his soul shall enter a leaf, to be tossed hither and thither by the wind; for it is said: "We all do fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away" (Isa. lxiv, 6). He who speaks evil, his soul shall enter a stone, like the soul of Nabal; for it is said: "His heart died within him and he became as a stone" (1 Sam. xxv, 37). Thus it is clear that in these cases a belief in

metempsychosis is extorted from extravagant interpretations of Biblical texts. These pedantic hair-splitting methods of exegesis are found to produce an even more brilliant result, in the supposed discovery that the soul of Cain must have passed into the body of Jethro, and the soul of Abel into the body of Moses, because Jethro gave Moses his daughter to wife. A similar idea, that a bond of sympathy between two men pointed to their relationship in a former life, was not alien even to such a writer as Goethe, as we shall afterwards see.

IN ISLAM

The great religions of the world, Islam and Christianity, have no official place for the reception of metempsychosis; the doctrine made its way, for the most part, into those sects which were especially open to foreign influence. Such, among the Mohammedans, were the sects of the so-called Mutazilites, the Druses and the Nossairians.

IN OTHER QUARTERS

Quite recently, an American, Samuel Ives Curtiss, explored the Hermon and Lebanon districts, the homes of the Druses and Nossairians, more thoroughly than any previous traveller, and extracts from his diaries provide some information upon their beliefs. It appears that, after the sacrifice of the usual offerings, the soul of the dead man may go forth by an opening over the house door and enter the body of a child on the eve of birth ; only the soul of a good man can enter a human body : the souls of bad men enter animals. These statements are in almost literal agreement with the account given of the Druses of the Hermon in the twelfth century by the learned Rabbi Joseph of Tudela, who made a journey to the east.

IN THE CHRISTIAN WORLD

Within the Christian world the doctrine of metempsychosis was adopted during the first centuries by isolated Gnostic sects,

and especially by the so-called Manichæans in the fourth and fifth centuries: it was invariably denied by the official church, as represented by Tertullian, Irenæus, Origen, Augustine, etc. We are reminded of the passage quoted previously from the Upanishads, when Bishop Epiphanius, the famous opponent of all heretics, says of Mani, the founder of the Manichæan sect, that he conceives the souls of men and other living things to rise after death from the twelve signs of the Zodiac in figures of light. Thence they reach their vessel. The moon and sun are ships. The smaller ship bears the burden for fifteen days, while the moon is growing full: after fifteen days the burden is transferred to the larger ship, the sun. This great ship, the sun, carries them to the æon of life and to the place of the blessed. This, however, is the destiny only of the good, or "true," i.e. real Manichæans. As regards the less good, Mani recognises three classes of men in general: beside the

true, there are the half-Manichæans, the so-called "hearkeners," on the one side, and, on the other, the non-Manichæans. We learn from the polemical writings of Augustine the two-fold fate which awaits these two classes: after death the souls of the "hearkeners," in the most fortunate cases, re-enter the body of a man, who becomes one of the "true," or they enter trees and plants, the fruit of which is eaten by the "true": melons and cucumbers are especially mentioned as thus eaten, and in this way the soul reaches purification. The souls of the non-Manichæans, if not condemned everlastingly, enter lowly and fruitless plants, which the Manichæans believed to derive their nourishment from the earth and not from the sunshine and free air, or they enter the bodies of animals. Some surprise may be aroused by the belief that reincarnation in an animal was regarded as inferior to that in a fruit-bearing plant. Such indeed was the opinion, strange as it

may seem, of the Manichæans, who regarded the animal world as inferior in the scale of creation to the vegetable world.

In the Middle Ages the traditions of Manichæan gnosticism were continued by the numerous sects known collectively as Cathari. The acts of the Inquisition provide much interesting matter from which we may gain a knowledge of their theory of metempsychosis: these documents have been admirably co-ordinated by the famous ecclesiastical historian Ignaz von Döllinger in his "Contributions to the History of Mediæval Sectarianism." The Cathari believed that the soul was forced to migrate from body to body, until it became reincarnate in a member of the sect, that it might then be absolved of all guilt by the sacrament of the laying-on of hands, and be received into Paradise after death. "When souls," they taught, "leave men's bodies after death they are so tortured by the demons of the air that they yearn to

find protection in some body. Hence these souls will enter even the bodies of animals, and many could well remember the period of their sojourn in a horse-hide. They could even relate how, when they were horses, they lost a shoe at this or that place: curious believers then made search at the place indicated and actually found a rusty horse-shoe. This story often recurs in the statements of the Cathari." It is a striking instance of the power of suggestion in matters of faith. "Many believed that they had passed through hundreds of bodies. Paul was said to have passed through thirteen bodies, according to some, and through thirty-two, according to others, before he attained the grace of God." Connected with the belief in metempsychosis is the prohibition against killing and eating animals, which was no less binding upon the Cathari than upon the Manichæans and Indians.

This belief affected mediæval scholasti-

cism and did not, indeed, lose its influence until modern times: it is apparent beneath the vigorous lines of the philosopher of the Renaissance, Giordano Bruno (1548–1600).

"Go then, fool, and tremble beneath the sword of Death.
Tremble and quake at the talk of fools: in quivering anguish
List to the foolish prate of the crowd, as if thou wert nothing,
Nothing, in sooth, but the dust of the earth and a clod from the fallow.
Is not thy body for ever transformed, and flows it not ever
Into the river of time? And in ceaseless alternation
Doth it not cast off the old for the new, ever losing and gaining?
Art so mad as to think that thy poor corporeal substance,
Whether in whole or in part, for ever shall be as it has been?
Art so mad as to dream that the bones and the flesh of thy boyhood
Still shall abide with thee now? that thou comest unchanged to thy manhood?
Seest thou not how thy limbs, renewed in the process of change,

Take to themselves new form? . . . Yet ever one nature persisting
Ruling within thy heart is forming for ever a being,
Thou thyself, that one and the same abidest unchanging.

. . . . . .

Thus springs life into light and bodies rise to perfection;
Out of the hidden seed thy being expands and increases,
What time the spirit-builder collects and gathers the atoms,
Welds them to form, and breathes in a spirit, and guides the creation
Up to time when the fetters that bind the life are broken,
And back to the seed flies the spirit, but *thence he again re-enters*
The world eternal and ageless. And this is 'death' to mortals,
Since in their folly they know not the light to which we hasten."

In the seventeenth century a different picture comes before us in the person of the philosopher or theosophist Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont (1618–1699), who attempted to revive the doctrine of metempsychosis in its crudest form. His is a

picture which borders upon caricature, and is not likely to be regarded seriously by any one who learns the complacency with which he prided himself upon discovering the elixir of life and the philosopher's stone. It was he who devoted his acumen to proving in his first published work that Hebrew was the natural language of mankind, and would naturally rise to the lips of every human being, even of the deaf and dumb, were it not for the disturbing influence of human society! In 1662 he was called before the Inquisition at Rome to answer for his heretical belief in metempsychosis, but he did not attain the honour of martyrdom.

Only passing mention need be made of Emanuel Swedenborg, the famous founder of the "New Church of the Heavenly Jerusalem" (1688–1772). He cannot be considered as a supporter of metempsychosis in the full sense of the term. But he evolved one idea, which is, for instance, the basis of

the whole of the Indian system of belief, and carried it to its logical consequences with greater consistency than any other thinker: this was the idea that a man becomes after death what he is and what he does in his earthly life. Thus, for instance, he says: "All spirits in the hells appear in the form of their own evil: for everyone there is an effigy of his own evil, because the interiors and exteriors act in unity, and the interiors are visibly exhibited in the exteriors, which are the face, the body, the speech, and the gestures," etc. On the same line of thought is his statement elsewhere, that those who possess bestial natures, who are, for instance, sly as foxes, afterwards appear in the actual form of these animals.

During the classical period of German literature metempsychosis attracted such attention that that period may almost be styled the flourishing epoch of the doctrine. Reference has been already made to Goethe, who was inclined to explain a bond of

sympathy between men as due to some relationship in a former state of existence.

> "Ah, in the depths of time gone by
> Thou wast my sister or my wife,"

he says to Frau von Stein, and he writes to Wieland (probably in April, 1776), "I cannot explain the significance to me of this woman or her influence over me, except by the theory of metempsychosis. Yes, we were once man and wife. Now our knowledge of ourselves is veiled, and lies in the spirit world. I can find no name for us—the past, the future, the All!" In a letter to Frau von Stein under date July 2, 1781, we also read: "How well it is that men should die, if only to erase their impressions and return clean washed."

These ideas seem to have been in the air at that time, and continually occupied men's minds. Lichtenberg (1742–1799) says of himself: "I cannot avoid the idea that I died before I was born"; in his "Aphorisms" also we meet with the transmigra-

tion of souls. In 1783 Johann Georg Schlosser, Goethe's brother-in-law, wrote two dialogues upon the same subject. In the same year appeared the posthumous dissertation of the English philosopher David Hume upon "The Immortality of the Soul," in which he declares that metempsychosis is the only theory of the kind seriously deserving the attention of philosophy. But the most important work upon the subject belongs to the year 1780, when no less a writer than Lessing came forward to defend the theory. Some two years previously (in his posthumous observations upon Campe's philosophical dialogues) he had indicated his opinion in the words: "Is it after all so certain that my soul has only once inhabited the form of man? Is it after all so unreasonable to suppose that my soul, upon its journey to perfection, should have been forced to wear this fleshly veil more than once? Possibly this migration of the soul through several human

bodies was based on a new system of thought. Possibly this new system was merely the oldest of all. . . ." Lessing refers to the theory of metempsychosis as nothing more than a "hypothesis," and even at times as a "freak of imagination." But in § 95 of his work, the "Education of the Human Race," he says: "Is this hypothesis ridiculous merely because it is the oldest, because the human intellect adopted it without demur, before men's minds had been distracted and weakened by the sophistry of the schools?" "On the contrary," says Lessing, in a fragment, "the first and earliest opinion in matters of speculation is invariably the most probable, because it was immediately accepted by the sound understanding of mankind." Hence attempts have been made to use the doctrine of metempsychosis as a key to explain the whole of Lessing's treatise. This, however, is a mistake: he merely uses the doctrine upon a special occasion as a means

to justify the action of God against the argument that His scheme for the education of the human race excludes a number of individuals from His blessings. "This is not so," says Lessing; on the contrary, "the path by which the race is to arrive at perfection must be trodden by every individual man (early and late). But can he be supposed to have traversed this path in one and the same life? Can a man be both a sensual Jew and a spiritual Christian in one and the same life? Can he surpass both of these in one and the same life? Surely not: but why should not every individual have lived more than one life in this world?" (§§ 93, 94). Then, in high enthusiasm, Lessing pours forth the eloquent passage which forms the famous conclusion of his "Education of the Human Race," his "religious Testament" as it has been called (§§ 96–100). "Why should I not at one time have taken those steps toward perfection which can bring but temporal rewards and punish-

ments to men? Why, again, should I not have made at another time that progress to which our vision of eternal reward is so great a help? Why should I not return as often as I am capable of acquiring fresh knowledge and further power? Do I achieve so much in one sojourning as to make it not worth my while to return? Never! Or, is it that I forget my former sojourn? Well for me that I forget. The recollection of my former state would enable me to turn my present condition to but poor account. And have I forgotten for ever what I must forget for the time being? Or is it that I should lose so much time? Lose time! What need have I for haste? Is not the whole of eternity mine?"

The whole of eternity belongs to the individual, and he may use it to rise upon the long ascent of self-development. Such is the idea of Lessing, which is found more philosophically expressed in a fragment belonging to the year 1777, "that man may

have more than five senses." The essential points of the fragment are as follows: the soul is a simple form of existence, capable of an infinite number of impressions. But it is also a finite being. Hence these infinite impressions are only experienced gradually in an infinite course of time. The order and proportion in which these impressions are slowly acquired are due to the senses. But the five senses which we at present use are not primordial. Nature never progresses by leaps and bounds; therefore the soul must have passed through all the stages inferior to that on which it now finds itself. It is therefore probable that man passed through a former life with fewer senses, and that he has traversed stages of existence marked by varying combinations of senses. This idea is combined with the further idea that every particle of matter can be useful to the soul in the development of a sense, and Lessing is thus led to assume that additional senses must be possible: as,

for instance, the sense of sight responds to light, so special senses could and certainly will respond to electrical and magnetic stimulus, and will inform us directly whether bodies are electrified or magnetised, which information can now be gained only by means of special research. A new world of the most marvellous phenomena will then be open to us, of which we can now conceive no more than early opticians knew of light and colour.

As Lessing tells us, his theory of metempsychosis was based upon the ideas of Charles Bonnet, a physicist of Geneva, who wrote a treatise in French in 1769 upon philosophical palingenesis (rebirth), giving many so-called proofs to show how from the original matter of the brain all created beings were transformed from corporeal to ethereal natures. Bonnet's ideas seem to have fallen upon fruitful soil elsewhere. In 1770 Lavater translated his treatise into German with annotations, and his social

environment also shows how the belief in soul-transmigration haunted the minds of that age. But not always were the best minds attracted, and as the doctrine gained adherents it lost seriousness, for which reason it probably became once more unfashionable and discredited. Light is thrown upon this downward course by manuscript entries in the diary of a woman of Zürich, who may be quoted as an eyè-witness of that interesting period. She says: "The friends of Lavater at Copenhagen believe in a transmigration of the soul. They believe that several of Jesus' apostles live again on earth, without any recollection of their former lives as apostles. Prince Karl of Hesse was the apostle Peter, and the Danish minister of state, Andreas of Bernsdorf, was Thomas. Lavater was once King Josiah of Judah; then he became Joseph of Arimathea, and then the reformer Ulrich Zwingli. The apostle John is still alive, as Jesus foretold, knows who he is, and can remember

his life with Jesus. He travels much about the world, and can assume different forms in order to avoid recognition. He is a freemason, and first visited Prince Karl of Hesse to ask his help as a brother mason. Prince Karl gave him some help and then dismissed him without paying any attention to him or realising with whom he was talking. Shortly afterwards the Prince received a letter from another mason, reproaching him for his neglect of this important traveller, and telling him that the man was St. John, who would visit him again. John did, in fact, return and made himself known to Peter, whose attention was now aroused. . . ." Such is the account given by the lady of Zürich. The fact that this royal Peter failed to understand the real character of his saintly mendicant brother was due to the strange illusions of suggestion: from this point of view the story will appear to be correctly placed in the book from which I have quoted it (Otto Stoll, " Sug-

gestion and Hypnotism in Racial Pyschology").

Thinkers of great self-restraint called for the abandonment of these theories. Herder's three dialogues upon the transmigration of the soul (dated 1791) are marked by greater naturalness of feeling. "To purify the heart and to ennoble the soul and all its instincts and desires, this seems to me the true palingenesis of the present life, after which there certainly awaits us a higher and brighter metempsychosis, but one of which we know nothing."

We shall not attempt to follow isolated traces of this belief which mark divergencies from the general course of intellectual progress during the nineteenth century and have been left by solitary and original thinkers, whose names are partly unknown. When the theory of metempsychosis has appeared in modern times it has usually come from foreign sources, as the inseparable companion of the Indian, and especially of

the Buddhist ideas which the West has been only too ready to receive. A conspicuous instance of the fact is to be found in Schopenhauer. His references to metempsychosis are certainly favourable: he praises it as a most admirable statement of theory in mythical form and declares: "Never has a myth, and never will a myth be more closely connected with philosophical truth, which is difficult to grasp, than this primæval doctrine professed by a most noble and ancient race." And again: "The myth of the transmigration of souls has this great advantage, that it contains no elements except those which lie before our eyes in the sphere of actuality, so that it is able in consequence to provide ocular proof of its conceptions"—a statement which should at least be qualified with a note of interrogation. Schopenhauer has even been included by some critics among the professed adherents of this belief. Consider, for instance, the passage in his "Parerga and Paralipo-

mena" : " Constantly as the pieces played and the masks worn upon the stage of the world may change, yet the players remain the same throughout. We sit in company and talk and grow excited : eyes light up and voices ring clearer : but so did others sit a thousand years ago : they and the scene were the same, and so shall it be a thousand years hence. The mechanism which prevents our realisation of this fact is time." To assert that the players are identical might seem tantamount to admitting the theory of metempsychosis. But in this very passage Schopenhauer makes a definite distinction between metempsychosis, " the transference of the so-called soul in its totality to another body," and the theory which he supports, palingenesis or rebirth, " the decomposition and reconstruction of a personality, in which process the will alone persists, assumes the form of a new organism, and receives a new intellect." In this sense must be interpreted another famous

passage in his work ("The World as Will and Imagination") where he speaks of the mysterious connection between the death of an existing individual and the birth of a new personality, as shown by the fact (?) that the more individuals die, the more are born. "Every new-born being enters its new existence joyously and enjoys it as a gift; but there is and can be no gift in question. His new life is bought by the age and death of an organism that has lived its span, but contains the indestructible germ from which new life springs. The old and the new are one being. To show the link connecting them would be to solve a very difficult problem." How impossible it was for Schopenhauer to solve this problem by a direct appeal to metempsychosis must be plain to everyone who has grasped his fundamental principle that Nature is careful of the type and not of the individual, and that her chief endeavour is the maintenance of the species.

On the other hand, the theory of metempsychosis proper may be found in modern dramatic literature. A case in point is Ibsen's "Cæsar and Galilean," in which the mysterious Mephistopheles-figure of Maximus says to the Emperor Julian: "One there is who ever returns to the life of the human race within a certain space of time. He is like a rider attempting to break a wild horse in the riding school. Time after time the horse throws him. But a while and he is in the saddle again, a little more firmly seated and with more experience: and yet fall he must in his various forms even to this day. He was doomed to fall as the man divinely wrought in the Garden of Eden: he was doomed to fall as the founder of a world-wide empire, or as the prince of the kingdom of God. Who knows how many times he has been among us unrecognised? Knowest thou, Julian, that thou wast not in him whom now thou persecutest?" (i.e. the "Galilean," Christ). Julian himself, in the

first part of the play, gives utterance to a similar thought. " In each of the changing generations was one soul, in which Adam rose again in purity: he was mighty in Moses the lawgiver: he had strength to subdue the world in Alexander of Macedon: he was almost perfect (Julian, the " apostate," is speaking) in Jesus of Nazareth."

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

IN concluding this brief review of the systems under which the doctrine of metempsychosis has been formulated in the course of history, we may venture to quote a passage which will carry us back several centuries: it is probably its noblest expression for all time; it is taken from the famous Persian mystic Djelal-eddin-Rumi (1207–1273), and may be rendered as follows:

"A stone I died and rose again a plant,
A plant I died and rose an animal;
I died an animal and was born a man.*

* cp. Herder's "Thought of the Origin and Growth of a Child's Life."

"When in thy mother's womb thou tookest thy life
From twain, and all unconscious of thyself,
Plant-like, wast hanging on another's heart,
Didst grow to animal and a child of man,
So say they—camest to the light of day."

From the poem, "The Ego."

Why should I fear? What have I lost by death?
As man, death sweeps me from this world of men
That I may wear an angel's wings in heaven:
Yet e'en as angel may I not abide,
For nought abideth save the face of God.
Thus o'er the angels' world I wing my way
Onwards and upwards, unto boundless heights;
Then let me be as nought, for in my breast
Rings as a harp-song, that we must return
To Him."

In such words as these we can catch the expression of that instinct which leads all men, whether they live under an Eastern or Western sky, directly to the conclusion that they are not "complete": we feel that we are growing and aspiring, and that one life is not enough to enable us to reach that perfection whither we are urged by the inmost depths of our being. Or do we not feel that our progress within this one life must force us to cry in the fine words of Rückert:

"Oh! for a longer life! Thou knowest thy faults and failings,
How they forbid thee yet to make thy home with the angels"?

The fulfilment of this desire is shattered by the stern fact of death, and then the doctrine of metempsychosis in its noblest form comes to compensate the ever-present consciousness of human inadequacy. It is essentially the same instinct which found expression in Roman Catholicism in the conception of a purgatorial fire. Metempsychosis and purgatory are simply more or less anthropomorphic methods of expressing the same instinct. But as that instinct is true for man, so do these beliefs undoubtedly contain a germ of truth, and on this germ they live, as all beliefs live upon the fragmentary truth which they hide within them. The moral and educational importance of the belief in metempsychosis lies in the fact that it is a manifestation of that instinct and also an evidence of the belief that all human action will be inevitably rewarded or punished, a belief especially native to Indian soil, and this is an importance which must not be under-estimated. In so far as the

theory is based upon the supposition that a personal divine power exists and dispenses this retributive justice, and that the soul must climb a long steep path to approach this power, does metempsychosis preserve its religious character. This, however, is not all: the theory is also the expression of another idea, which gives it a philosophical character. It is the earliest intellectual attempt of man, when considering the world and his position in it, to conceive that world, not as alien to him, but as akin to him, and to incorporate himself and his life as an indispensable and eternal element in the past and future of the world with which it forms one comprehensive totality. I say an eternal element, because, regarded philosophically, the belief in metempsychosis seems a kind of unconscious anticipation of the principle now known as the "conservation of energy." Nothing that has ever existed can be lost either in life *

* The publisher has called my attention to the following verse of Christian Wagner (born 1835), in which he ex-

or by death. All is but change, and hence souls do not perish, but return again and again in ever-changing forms. Moreover, later developments of metempsychosis, especially as conceived by Lessing, can without difficulty be harmonised with the modern idea of evolution from higher to lower forms.

But at this point we see the truth, as soon as the depths are plumbed a little deeper, of a statement of Goethe (to Eckermann, on 1 September, 1829): "Immortality, the nature of the soul and its connection with the body, are eternal problems concerning which philosophers can give us no help." Historically, as we have clearly seen throughout our examination of this subject, the

presses the thought of a "metempsychosis during the course of life."

"Yea, thy fragrant breath—who knows?
May lend fragrance to the rose;
All the love that it expressed
May be rosebuds at thy breast;
Breaths of distant childhood yet
Greet thee in the violet."

belief in metempsychosis is profoundly rooted in the superstitious theory of the world, the so-called "animism" maintained by primitive man, whose childlike simplicity led him to regard every being in his environment as made in his own image, of which again his idea was no less simple, as in short endowed with souls ("animæ") like his own. Are our views to remain upon the level of the beliefs of primitive man? Surely we should not run the risk of also losing ourselves in the contemplation of the objective world, but should rather consider that the time is at hand to think of the manhood within us and to differentiate this element from all external beings below the level of humanity. But at the same time we do not thus strengthen the claim of our own souls to a past of their own: indeed, a modern thinker cannot evade the strong impression made by scientific instruction in the facts of heredity. Assuming that my soul has entered my present body, after a

greater or less interval of time, from a former body in which I once lived, how am I to explain the strong likeness which unquestionably connects me with my parents and my family? It is a similarity which includes spirit and mind as well as body. We have indeed had occasion to point out that this very fact of family likeness was a partial stimulus to the belief in metempsychosis, in so far as attempts were made to explain family resemblances by assuming that the soul of a dead ancestor had become reincarnate (see above, p. 26). But how can the likeness of a child to its living parents be explained? The following answer has been given: "As surely as the particles of oxygen will leave particles of other gases for their own kind, so will the *karma*-laden soul (i.e. the soul burdened with the consequences of its former actions) seek the mode of incarnation with which it is brought into connection by a mysterious power of attraction." In this phrase, from the works of

the well-known theosophist Sinnett, the suspicious element to me is the word "mysterious." Just where we require enlightenment mystery seems to prevail, and this fact is enough to show that metempsychosis can never be more than a hypothesis at best. It is a hypothesis utterly incapable of explaining such facts as the increase of degeneracy in families of drunkards: the children bear the heavy burden that parents and grandparents have raised, each member adding his own contribution to the whole. Many have witnessed the tragical struggle waged by the children of such parents, striving with all their might and shrinking from no laudable endeavour to shake off the crushing burden, and perhaps falling at last beneath its weight. The fact is that we can never break with a past, though it is foreign to us. Consciously we may refuse to admit its connection with ourselves, but unconsciously, under the mask of what we desire to be, there will

always be a hint of what we have acquired from others, and perhaps from our nearest and dearest.

> "Each word that we may speak, and in the face
> Each feature is another's, yet is ours,
> Our very own, yet lent us but for use.
> Thus, ever changing, alternating, creeps
> The holder of another's goods through life."
>
> Herder, "The Ego."

Passing reference has been made to the fact that the doctrine of metempsychosis is inconsistent with the constant increase of the world's population. Whence come these ever-increasing souls? Undue stress, however, must not be laid upon this argument, which is admittedly anthropomorphic and inadequate as a means of criticism.

When the idea of strict moral retribution becomes dominant in the theory of metempsychosis, the moral importance of the doctrine is materially limited by the fact that the individual soul in process of migration through several bodies preserves no recollection of former existences or of actions per-

formed during them. Buddha, Pythagoras, and others are certainly said to have been able to view the whole series of their former lives. These, however, are purely miraculous cases, and whatever view of their occurrence may be adopted, the fact remains that ordinary mortals do not enjoy the advantages of this special capacity. But may not the ordinary man discover within himself some dim traces of this memory of past lives? Many have found themselves in circumstances which they seemed to know by past experience, though unable to state that they had ever encountered a similar situation in their present lives. "I came to places and found myself in circumstances where I could have sworn that I had already been. I saw people with whom I thought I had lived and upon whose old acquaintanceship I was ready to rely": these words Herder places in the mouth of his Theages in his first dialogue upon the transmigration of the soul. But when his

interlocutor Charicles can suggest no other explanation of these experiences than "recollection of a former state of existence," the further assertions of Theagès may serve as a warning against such premature conclusions. His words may therefore be quoted at length, as his argument has not now lost its value, notwithstanding the somewhat exalted style in which it is propounded and which was characteristic of the spirit of that age.

Theages says: "Have you never observed in your own case how the soul is ever busy within itself? How, especially in childhood and youth, it makes plans, co-ordinates ideas, builds bridges, imagines stories, and dreamily repeats all these imaginings decked with the magical colouring of dreams? Watch that child quietly playing and talking to himself. As he talks he is in a dream of living pictures. Some day these pictures and thoughts will come back to him, at a time when he does not expect them and cannot tell whence they

come. They will come before him with all the scenic decoration in which he first conceived them, or in which some dream of his youth first created them. The situation will become an agreeable delusion to his mind, as every act of recollection which is easy and fruitful in idea is delusive: he will regard it as an inspiration from another world, because it comes in that character, namely, without trouble and with a wealth of imagery. One single feature in the scene immediately before him may suffice to recall this past: one single chord vibrating to his heart will arouse the slumbering melodies of past times. These are moments of sweetest exaltation, especially amid wild and beautiful scenery, or in pleasant converse with those whom we unexpectedly regard as friends of an older time, because we are sweetly deceived in them, or they in us: recollections of paradise, not of a human life already lived, but of the paradise of youth, of childhood and its happy

dreams which came to us sleeping or waking, and are, in very truth, real paradise. Thus palingenesis is a truth, not so marvellous, however, as you supposed, but very natural."

If we wish to test an instance, one comes to us almost unsought, in Hölderlin's words to Diotima, which were written about the same time.

"Diotima! Noble being!
Mine by kinship's holy tie,
Sister, ere my hand I gave thee,
Long I knew thee lovingly."

We are reminded of Goethe's words concerning his former relationship with Frau von Stein (see above p. 104). But Hölderlin does not, like Goethe, directly assume acquaintanceship or relationship in an earlier state of existence. It is enough for him to refer to the dreams of his childhood within the limits of this present life, and he therefore continues as follows:

"Then it was, in wandering day-dreams,
Heedless of the cheerful day,
That beneath the spreading branches
I, in happy boyhood, lay,

Then the May-time of my soul
Slow unfolded sweet delight,
And I felt thy heavenly breath
O'er me, as the Zephyr light."

Assuming, then, that experience of this kind can merely revive and intensify certain dim recollections of early life in this world and that we cannot recall any earlier state of existence, what is the use of believing that this life is an expiation for the guilt which we have incurred in former lives, or what does it matter in what form we are born again, if no memory can connect this present mode of existence with any that may be to come?

The solution of this great problem of existence which metempsychosis professes to offer thus leaves, in general, many difficulties unanswered; therefore, if the theory be examined from the religious point of view, it is more than ever difficult to recognise it as the means specially chosen by God for uplifting the human soul to Himself. But in these matters we can only conclude by

humbly admitting, with Herder's Charicles (at the end of the dialogues upon metempsychosis), that " we will not venture to make the secret ways of Providence into a hypothesis serving as a track or high-road, upon which mankind would either be lost in fear or the idle and insolent would secure a footing." Yet, though we are enclosed within the limits of our short earthly life, we aspire to the infinite, because an eternal flame is burning in our hearts. In letters of fire it seems to proclaim that we must in some way rise beyond the limits of ourselves. Metempsychosis is an ancient and a serious, if a feeble attempt to decipher the meaning of this fiery message.

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